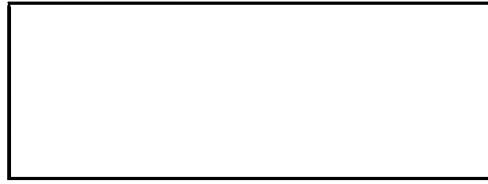


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ARGENTINA: High-level government officials are optimistic that a major breakthrough is imminent in negotiations with Juan Peron toward an electoral agreement.

Justice Minister Quijano told the US ambassador that the Argentine ambassador to Spain had carried a message to President Lanusse last weekend in which Peron had renounced any desire for the presidency and stated that he would accept a military man as the next president. The justice minister, a close political adviser to the president, said that Lanusse probably will visit Spain at the invitation of Chief of State Franco and personally conclude the agreement with Peron, who is in exile in Madrid.

Peronists make up the largest electoral bloc in Argentina, and some agreement with Peron is necessary if fair elections are to be held as Lanusse has promised. The military has consistently rejected the possibility of Peron's return to power, and Lanusse's task is to attract the support of a sufficient number of moderate Peronists to assure the victory of the military candidate. He has sought to divide the Peronist movement while keeping the door open for an agreement with Peron.

The Lanusse government will undoubtedly be wary of these concessions by Peron who is well known for his political double-dealing, but his advanced age and his apparent inability to reunite the Peronist forces suggest that he might be serious this time. Lanusse views Peron as a vain man who is enjoying the easy life in Madrid, and the military probably would consent to financial assistance for the old dictator and the rehabilitation of his image in exchange for his cooperation. The government also appears willing to meet Peron's demand that the elections be held this year rather than in March 1973 as now planned.

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THAILAND: The military government apparently has decided to delay further a return to constitutional rule.

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Thanom

told the US ambassador on 24 February that more government reorganization must be accomplished before a new cabinet is named.

One effect of the delay will probably be to assure Thanom's position as head of the government for a few more months. He has been under pressure to retire as commander of the armed forces and to step aside so Praphat could become head of the government.

The Bangkok leaders' preoccupation with a growing insurgent threat in northern Thailand may have been a consideration in the decision to continue ruling by executive decree. Thailand's largest counterinsurgency effort to date is targeted against a Communist stronghold in the north. The operation is receiving widespread publicity in the Bangkok press and is being viewed as a test of the Thai Government's determination. The rebels repeatedly have thwarted efforts to capture their central base complex and have inflicted heavy casualties on government troops. The 12,000-man Thai force is being reinforced with three more battalions, and the operation, originally scheduled to terminate this week, has been extended indefinitely.

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